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Speech of Mr. McDuffie,

In the Senate of the United States, on the passage of the bill for the settlement and occupation of the Oregon Territory.

Mr. McDuffie rose and addressed the Senate. A wise and prudent man, (said Mr. McD.) in any of the various departments of human affairs, would be very reluctant to engage in any enterprise, however thoroughly satisfied of his right to do so, until he should have well considered, first, the appropriate time for its commencement; secondly, the means by which it was to be accomplished, and its probable cost; and, finally, the benefits which were ultimately to result from its accomplishment. And he must be permitted to say, if the worthy Senator from Missouri, who had, with so much zeal and ability, presented this bill to the consideration of the Senate, had vacated any of the maxims of sound policy, (as he homely conceived he had,) it had arisen from the circumstance of totally overlooking the considerations to which he had just alluded. All these Senators who had engaged in this discussion seemed to have limited their investigations to what he was compelled to regard as the most unimportant of all the questions which this measure involves. They had confined themselves to the mere abstract question of the right of title. They had argued the question as if the Senate of the United States was the tribunal which was to adjust and determine the question of the validity of the English or the American title; and as if this was the only question to be determined. He believed no Senator, who had taken part in this discussion, had expressed the slightest doubt as to the validity of the title of the United States to the Territory of Oregon. He had investigated the subject as fully and as thoroughly as the documentary evidence to which he had been able to obtain access had enabled him to do; and with these lights before him, he was free to declare that he regarded the title of the United States, at least as far north as the forty-ninth parallel of latitude, as one of the clearest titles that was ever the subject of national controversy. But, at the same time, that he made this declaration, he would be very sorry to assume the responsibility of precipitating the nation into any measure upon his own judgment, or the judgment of the Senate, upon questions which it did not belong to either to determine. Gentlemen seemed to have forgotten that there were two parties interested in this question; and that however clear our title might appear to us, they might appear equally clear to the other party. Here was a case of joint occupancy, and existing question as to title. The Senate had seemed, throughout the whole discussion, to assume that ours was the true title, and were proceeding upon that assumption, although the British, at the same time, claimed that theirs was the true title. By whom were these conflicting claims to be settled? By one of the interested parties? Certainly not.

A few words on the subject of the convention of 1818, which had been indefinitely prolonged by that of 1827. He concurred perfectly with those Senators who had maintained that the provision of this act, which granted, or stipulated to grant, allodial titles, or titles, in fee simple, to all these citizens of this country who might emigrate to that territory, was a palpable violation of the convention. It was in vain to disguise the fact whatever might be determined in regard to this matter. They were about to take possession of the territory, to establish a line of American fort, and by all the means and appliances of war, to defend that possession. They were about to invite the citizens of this country to go there—not for the purpose of carrying on the fur trade; not to do that which was consistent with a joint occupancy by the two parties to the convention; but to establish a permanent settlement. The British government and the British nation, however, might disguise the fact in our arguments here, could not be so blind as not to perceive the pal-

pable object of this measure. He begged to inquire of the worthy Senators who took so deep an interest in the fate of this bill, what was the existing emergency which called upon the United States to take that step. The question, for the last twenty-four years, had been allowed to slumber, while we were in the midst of the greatest national prosperity, with a treasury so abundantly supplied, that the wit and ingenuity of man could not find out a legitimate mode of disencumbering it of its superabundant treasure. He called upon Senators to state what was the existing emergency, which demanded, now, that a measure of this kind should be adopted. Why was it that they were involved at this moment—and, he must be permitted to say, this inauspicious moment—to enter into a measure of this kind? Why had it not been done some twenty years ago, or at some subsequent period prior to the present? He was decidedly averse to embark in it now. What was the condition of our affairs in relation to England? Had they already forgotten that only the other day a momentary treaty had been concluded with England, concerning one of the most embarrassing difficulties that had arisen since the termination of the late war? He would ask, how and at what instance, was that adjustment made? It was made at the instance of that nation, concerning whose grasping ambition so much had been said by gentlemen on this floor. Was it her ambition, her love of conquest, and desire of the acquisition of territory, that induced England to send to us the olive branch of peace, and she thanked God for our Government's acceptance of it in the spirit it was tendered. He was not disposed to find that fault with the result of those negotiations, even if they had involved much more territory than was conceded, had it been done with the consent of the State immediately interested, and consistently with the honor of the country. He would rather that peace should be made on almost any terms, than to go to war. The matter had been adjusted; and he must be permitted to say, that for the adjustment of this question, if for nothing else, the people of the United States owed a debt of lasting gratitude to the Administration by whom this adjustment had been effected; and he would go further, and say, that every patriot in England and the U. S., would shake hands and declare that the Government of each was indebted to the negotiators. He thanked God that the treaty had been brought to a successful termination. Well, sir, (said Mr. McD.) will the congressional act, on the termination of these great difficulties, at such a moment as this, what are we about to do? While a part of our territorial boundary remained still to be adjusted—while the question was still a subject of pending negotiation between the two countries—the Senate of the United States, a branch of the Legislature, in its own council, with the treaty-making power, is about to adopt a military movement, in order to take military possession of the territory. Now, however, we may view this act, whatever interpretation may be placed upon it—I will ask, gentlemen, to assume to themselves, for a moment, the position of the British ministry, and imagine what would be the natural effect upon the most important difficulty. Instead of reproaching the amiable spirit manifested by them, we are about to send forth the flaming sword of defiance—yes, at the very moment our minister was instructed to negotiate for a settlement of the question, we snatch from their hands the olive branch of peace, and place the sword of defiance in their stead. This may be strong language; but strong is its own nature, and the natural interpretation which will be placed on our conduct, if this bill be passed, by Great Britain.

I have asked, what is the emergency which demands the passage of this bill? Is there any probability that we shall fall in the adjustment of the question by negotiation? If gentlemen believe we shall fail, and that we shall ultimately become the necessity of resorting to force of arms to establish our title and maintain our occupation, this is an additional reason why we should adopt no measure which in the estimation of the civilized world, and in our own, could possibly place us in the wrong. Let us fairly and honorably try to adjust this boundary, as we have done the other. And, as I think the title of the United States is infinitely more clear than that upon which the negotiation has just terminated, I think the probability of an amicable adjustment is so much the greater. But the gentlemen say we must proceed in this way—we must take possession, because the British are doing the same. They are making lodgments, establishing settlements, looking forward to the exclusive possession at some future period. Now, I totally dissent from this opinion; and if there is any one conclusion to which the documents before the Senate must irresistibly bring the minds of Senators, it is that Great Britain has not the remotest idea—that she has not done a solitary act, nor uttered a solitary word, on the question, evincing the remotest desire to make a permanent exclusive settlement in that territory. All that she desired, and all that they have ever claimed, is the right

to prosecute the fur-trade, and to make such temporary settlements as were necessary to accomplish that object. Have they done more, sir? It is true the worthy Senator from Kentucky (Mr. Morehead) made a formidable array of charges against England, in reference to acts which she has already done. In the first place, that she has made a fort one hundred miles from the mouth of Columbia river; and the gentleman with that candor which forbids him to suppress any part of the truth, read a full account of that fort, concluding with a statement that it was a mere stockade fort, in its very character intended for no other purpose than to repel the attacks of Indians, and so it is with all the other forts, which they have established. This then amounts to nothing; furnishes no evidence of an intention of establishing permanent settlements, the idea of which seems to have taken hold of the minds of Senators. The Senator from Kentucky related another very important fact. He said, England has violated the convention, which stipulated the joint occupancy in the prosecution of the fur-trade; because, whenever our boats ascended the Columbia river to trade with the Indians, they were immediately driven off by the English, who had the audacity to come there and sell goods to the poor half-breed natives. This was a violation of this convention. But, if we cannot afford to sell them goods at a cheap rate, it surely does not show a very christian spirit. But all this is mere words. I put it to the Senate whether any one, in the course of this discussion, has put his finger on a solitary act which indicated an intention, on the part of Great Britain, to establish for herself an exclusive occupancy. I assert that, as far as I have examined, I have discovered no evidence of any such intention.

Now, Mr. President, having passed these brief views, tending to show the inexpediency of adopting such a measure at this time, in reference to negotiations between the two countries, let me ask the Senate what will be the natural interpretation to that England will put upon our act? If we had passed the measure without debate it might not have been regarded in any degree offensive; but you may rest assured, when this act comes to be regarded by the British Ministry, particularly if they have any desire to the possession of the territory, what will be the interpretation they will put upon it? They will interpret the act by the speeches delivered. Will they not, sir? Consult your own bosoms. What is the impression produced upon yourselves when an English paper—not even a ministerial paper—throws out denunciations against the United States?

What then, will be their interpretation of this act, military in its character, heralded forth to the world with denunciations against England, on account of her grasping ambition—referring to her acts in the Eastern hemisphere, in Asia and in China, as well as on this continent? Sir, however calm you may hear these things, the British will not hear them with calmness. Now, sir, let me tell you how many gentlemen are mistaken as to the feeling existing in England in regard to this subject. I was there for about six months, during the years 1838 and 1839; and if I were called upon on my oath to declare what appeared to be the most prevailing sentiment in England, I would say it was an absolute horror of the idea of a war with America. All ranks, high and low, every person I encountered, in the highway and elsewhere, universally concurred in the sentiment that the ancient feud that had separated the two countries had passed away—that a new era had dawned upon that they were bound together by the strongest ties of consanguinity, both being of the Anglo-Saxon race, differed from all the rest of the world; and I heard the language used—language in which I concurred—that if the two Governments, on a question of mere boundary, which might be entrusted to arbitrators, should involve themselves in war, they would deserve the eternal execration of the world. This was the universal sentiment.

Sir, I am not afraid of being charged with dreading the tremendous power of England. Surely, the courage of the people of the United States, trusted in so many glorious battles by land and by sea, is not reduced to so low an ebb, that they will encounter the hazard of being thought to be cowardly, because they act from the desire to be considered just. No, sir; no such interpretation will be put upon our conduct. I confidently believe, then, that if we wait with patience, and fairly employ the means of peace which are in our hands, and leave the executive department of the Government to discharge its duty, I confidently believe from the progress already made in the adjustment of our difficulties, that this comparatively unimportant one would be adjusted. So far, sir, regards our foreign relations.

But there are some domestic views of

the subject which gentlemen have overlooked. What do we want with this territory? What are we to do with it. What is to be the consequence of our taking possession of it? What is the act we are called on now to do? Why, it is neither more nor less than the act of colonization for the first time proposed since the foundation of this Government. If this were a question of gradual and continuous, and progressive settlement—if the territory to which our citizens are invited, were really to become a part of this Union, it would present a very different question. But, sir, does any man seriously suppose that any State which can be formed at the mouth of the Columbia river, or any of the mountainous parts of that territory would ever become one of the States of this Union? Had great faith—one had much greater—in the power of the Representative principle to extend the sphere of government; but I confess that, even in the most sanguine days of my youth, I never conceived the possibility of embracing within the same Government people living 5000 miles apart. But, sir, the worthy Senator from New Hampshire, (Mr. Woodbury,) seems to have discovered a principle much more potent than the representative principle. He refers you to steam, as far more potent. I should not doubt very much whether the elements, or powers, or organization of the principles of government, will ever be claimed by steam. How are we to apply steam in this case? Has the Senator examined the character of the country? What is the character of the country? Why, as I understand it, that about seven hundred miles this side of the Rocky Mountains is uninhabited, where ran severely ever falls—a barren sandy soil. On the other side—we have it from a very intelligent gentleman, sent to explore that country by the State Department, that there are three successive ridges of mountains extending to the Pacific, and running nearly parallel; which mountains are to be impassable except in certain parts, where there are gaps or depressions, to be reached only by going some hundreds of miles out of the direct course. Well, now, what are we to do in such a case? If it were you going to any steam? Have you made any thing like an estimate of the cost of a railroad running from here to the mouth of the Columbia? Why the wealth of the Indies would be inefficient. You would have to tunnel through mountains five or six or six hundred miles in extent. Is it true they have constructed a tunnel beneath the Channel; but at a vast expenditure of capital. Well, a bankrupt is very ready to propose and suffering people to risk about constructing a railroad to the western shore of Africa, and to build a wild spirit of a venture which I never expected to hear broached in the Senate of the United States. And is the Senate of the United States to be the last entrenched where we are to build this wall of adversity which has involved this country in ruin? I cannot shut the two doors, the honest advocates of the bill, look now only to God in his mercy, and throw down the tools of the devil from the wickedness in which the world is involved, and schemes of adventure have involved them.

Now, it is one of the most unadvised measures which was ever brought before the Senate. For whose benefit are we bound to pass it? Who are to go there, along the line of military posts, and take possession of the territory fit to occupy—that part lying upon the sea coast, a strip less than one hundred miles in width; for as I have already stated, the rest of the territory consists of mountains almost inaccessible, and low lands which are covered with stone and volcanic remains, where rain never falls, except during the spring; and even on the coast no rain falls from April to October, and for the remainder of the year there is nothing but rain. Why, sir, of what use will this be for agricultural purposes? I would not for that purpose give a pinch of snuff for the whole territory. I wish to God we did not own it. That it was an impassable barrier to secure us against the intrusion of others. This is the character of the country. Who are we to send there? Do you think your honest farmers in Pennsylvania, New York, or even Ohio or Missouri will abandon their farms to go upon such an enterprise as this? God forbid! If any man who is to go to that country under the temptations of this bill, was my child—if he was an honest and industrious man, I would say to him for God's sake, do not go there. You will not better your condition. You will exchange the comforts of home, and happiness of civilized life, for the pains and perils of a precarious existence; but if I had a son, whose conduct was such as made him a subject for Botany Bay, I would say, in the name of God, do not go. This is my estimate of the importance of the settlement. Now, what are we to gain by making the settlement? In what shape are our expenditures to be returned? When are we to get any revenue from the citizens of ours to go to that distant territory—3,300 miles from the seat of Government, as I have it from the Senator from Missouri? What return are they going to make us for protecting them with military posts, at an expense at the

outset of \$200,000, and swelling hereafter. God knows how much—probably equalling the annual expenses of the Florida war. What will they return us for this enormous expense, after we have tempted them, by this bill, to leave their pursuits of honest industry, to go upon this wild and gambling adventure, in which their blood is to be stake?

Sir, does any man suppose that in the next twenty years we shall derive a cent of revenue? I put it to the Senate, is there a man here who supposes that the wealth or power of the United States will be increased to the amount of one solitary cent by all the colonists that may be prevailed upon to go there? No, sir, not a cent. Well now make a moderate estimate; what do you think it will cost, on the scale on which you set out, during the next twenty years? Why, if you got off with ten millions of dollars, it will be about what any reasonable man would consider a proper estimate. The country is inhabited by fierce and warlike savages. It is a country abounding with recesses to which they can retreat, and in which they will be inaccessible; and if we ever get to war with them, (and we know by experience that the most certain way to get to war is to go among them,) we shall find another Florida; and every person knows how much the expenses of that unfortunate war had exceeded the anticipations of those who had foreboded the worst. Sir, the interests of the people of the United States throwing out of view the ancient and unpatriotic desire of adventurers and consulting the interests of the agricultural and manufacturing interests of the country, I venture to say that for the next twenty years, there is not a congressional district in this Union, existing the Government nothing, but on the contrary a drain upon its support, which will not be more valuable to the United States than the whole of this territory. It never can be of any value for agricultural purposes.

All the accounts I have read concur, without any dissenting voice in stating that the fur trade is in rapid course of destruction. The animals which yield fur are disappearing; and the time is not remote when even the British fur company will abandon the country, if you leave them alone. Say you have a prospect, by the mere lapse of time—by the mere progress of events—by the extermination of animals—of having the territory drop into our possession. But if the British had no claim to this territory, and there were nothing which compelled us to go without military establishments and agricultural settlements, I would not consent—there was an embankment of even five feet to be removed, I would not consent to expend five dollars to remove that embankment to enable our population to go there. I do not wish to tempt the people to make settlements there. I wish to be a great empire, grown up by the natural course of civilization, and the natural extension of population. I thank God for his mercy in placing the Rocky Mountains there. I believe, if it had not been for those mountains, we would have been already in the Pacific. You cannot civilize a nation if they have an indefinite extent of territory over which to spread their numbers; for so long as they spread their numbers, instead of becoming civilized, they become semi-savage. All agree that civilization can best be effected when the country is hedged in by narrow boundaries.

Why, Mr. President, if there is any one lesson calculated by history, beyond the possibility of doubt, it is that all nations of the world which have within the last one or two centuries sent out distant colonies, have found them to be two or three times more expensive than profitable. There is nothing which can justify such an enterprise, but the existence of a superabundant and starving population. In our case there is no such necessity. Are we pent up within the narrow limits—are we stifled for air—are we starving for want of means of subsistence? Why, sir, we are very much distressed, to be sure; but it is from plethora, not from consumption. We are now in a condition in which a Senator from Kentucky, in discussing the tariff bill, told us we were; and that is—in a most deplorable condition. The barns were full, were breaking down with the weight of grain; the country was overburdened with a superabundance of all the means of human subsistence. This is the case now. In the history of the United States, a period was never known of such an abundance of every thing necessary to support human life—corn selling for ten to twelve and a half cents a bushel; wheat at forty cents, and every other article of consumption in proportion—and with a country like this, and with a soil as productive as the valleys of Egypt, and so extensive that you cannot people it for a century to come—with such a soil, and with such means for rewarding the honest agricultural laborer, shall we, at an enormous expense, derived from taxes upon the labor of the industrious, indulge the whims and caprices of the adventurous portion of the population, who love to roam over the mountains; it is not proper to hold out such inducements to our citizens to engage in

these adventurous pursuits. There are no advantages to be derived from them. The advantages of the fur trade have been highly extolled; but I have seen no results but the enormous wealth of John Jacob Astor, and one or two others, to justify the commutation. Are the honest mechanic and agriculturist, engaged in the honest pursuits of industry, to be taxed, that inducements may be held out to the adventurous to engage in this trade which has enriched so few.

Have you read the account of Astor's adventures in the fur trade? You will there find that the most of his operators were foreigners and the half-breed Indians. There were no citizens of the United States employed by him; and by this bill you will induce none of your citizens to embark but those of an adventurous character—those who have nothing to lose. I cannot think any man who has a strong feeling of patriotism—who has a heart bound to his country as it ought to be, and encouraging associations inseparably connected with home—would abandon his friends and family and all endeared to him, to emigrate to that country. No sir; emigrating as it may be to one portion of the Union, this is a part we ought not to encourage. We ought rather to induce the honest and industrious class to remain among us, and contribute to the support of their Government.

But, in the order with which gentlemen have been drawn into the discussion of this question, they seem to have totally overlooked a very important matter, the ways and means. Do we so abound in financial resources, as to be able at this particular moment, to appropriate \$200,000 to a scheme of this kind? Have gentlemen considered the question of ways and means? I have not heard a single individual, in the course of the debate, make the slightest reference to the pecuniary means of this country to justify such an appropriation. I must, however, except the Senator from New Hampshire. At the close of his remarks, he made a slight allusion to our finances, rather with a view of showing that, as bad as they were, we might make the appropriation to carry the plan into operation. That gentleman was himself Secretary of the Treasury, at a period of great financial embarrassment; and the situation to which he was then exposed, no doubt, brought him to sympathy with the present Secretary of that Department, and to consider the importance of having ways and means; and the still greater importance of prosecuting this measure, whether you have the ways and means or not. Well, sir, two great political parties are now contending for power. They have both, in some degree, adopted the same watchword—economy and retrenchment. That was the sign under which Whigs conquered in 1841; it is the sign under which the Republicans hope to conquer now. Hitherto, on this subject, we have had nothing but words. I have not seen the slightest efforts to establish, in the administration of this Government any system of economy. I have not witnessed any apparent misgiving in the minds of Senators who are favorable to the adoption of this measure, as to the deficient condition of the finances. I confidently believe that we will not have a sufficiency of means to carry on the Government, and to pay the ordinary demands which are contracted on its behalf. The expenditure which the Government is required to make will not leave at the end of the year, anything to be applied to the object contemplated in this bill.

I have seen a statement of the probable amount of the imports of the last quarter, purporting to come from a person who had investigated the subject thoroughly who had time and the means to investigate it; and the result was, that the probable amount of the whole imports for that period would be little more than eight millions. What does this indicate? A state of things which, of all others, calls upon us to pause.

What is the condition of this Government? Who is it that rules? Who is responsible for the measures adopted here? Nobody, sir. We are in a state of interregnum. Nobody is responsible. For God's sake, let us postpone measures of this kind until there is somebody in the Government responsible. The Executive is exerting, no doubt the best of his powers to do something but he is not sustained by the other branches of the Legislature. Neither of the parties seem to have any sympathy for the Executive. They stand by, and fold their arms. If you should say to either of them, you have appropriated \$200,000 without having the means to meet that appropriation, they would say it does not concern us, it belongs to the other party to provide the ways and means. For God's sake, then let us not adopt equivocal measures of this kind when there is no party responsible for anything. Wait a year or two. Within that period you will have a chance of having that territory gained by amicable negotiation. Within that period you will certainly have somebody at the head of this Government—whether Democratic or Whig—of sufficient power to assume the responsibility of the measures adopted for administering the Government. I be-